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THE REALIZATION OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Human rights and extreme poverty

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its forty-fourth session, the General Assembly, convinced that the severe suffering of innumerable human beings throughout the world, particularly those in conditions of extreme poverty, called for the strengthening of a common sense of human solidarity, adopted resolution 44/148 on 15 December 1989 entitled "Human rights based on solidarity". In that resolution, the General Assembly requested the Commission on Human Rights to obtain from States, the specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, as well as from other international organizations, including non-governmental organizations, their views and to study the question.

2. At its forty-sixth session, the Commission on Human Rights, aware of the necessity of a better understanding of the causes of extreme poverty, including the causes connected with the problems of development, and its interaction with the enjoyment of human rights, adopted resolution 1990/15 entitled "Human rights and extreme poverty". In that resolution the Commission requested States, United Nations bodies, the specialized agencies and other international organizations, including non-governmental organizations, when making known their views on human rights based on solidarity, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 44/148, to give the necessary attention to the fact that extreme poverty and exclusion from society constitute a violation of human dignity and that urgent national and international action is required to eliminate them.

3. It also requested the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to examine the question of extreme poverty and exclusion from society in greater depth and to carry out a specific study on this question.

4. In accordance with the mandate provided by operative paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 44/148 and operative paragraph 2 of Commission on Human Rights resolution 1990/15, the Secretary-General, by a note verbale and letter dated 28 January 1991, sought the comments and views of all Governments, United Nations bodies and organizations, as stated in the resolutions.

5. By 30 April 1991, the Secretary-General had received substantive replies from the Governments of Colombia, Tunisia and Tuvalu. Comments have also been transmitted by the following United Nations bodies: United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs; World Food Programme (WFP); World Food Council (WFC). The following specialized agencies responded: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); International Labour Organisation (ILO); World Health Organization (WHO). Replies were also received from: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). The following intergovernmental organizations submitted

their comments: Council of Europe and Organization of American States (OAS). One non-governmental organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, submitted its views.

6. Although in neither of the two resolutions has a report on the basis of the replies received been requested, the Secretary-General considered it opportune to undertake a compilation of the views and comments that he received on the subject, particularly in view of Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities decision 1990/119 in which it requested one of its members to prepare the method and plan of work for the study on human rights and extreme poverty requested by Commission on Human Rights resolution 1990/15.

7. Any additional comments which are received by the Secretary-General will be submitted as an addendum to the present report.

I. COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

A. Colombia

[10 April 1991]
[Original: Spanish]

8. I wish to inform you that, in view of the situation of poverty which affects the marginal sectors of the population and the need to guarantee all sectors of the population full access to adequate food, minimum health services, education and housing, the Government of Colombia has, in recent years, been implementing specific programmes and plans for social change and for the protection of the economic, social and cultural rights of the population.

9. In order to ensure the equitable distribution of resources and greater well-being for the marginal sectors of the population, the Government of Colombia undertook in 1986 to strike a balance between the achievement of social development goals and sustained production growth. Action to combat extreme poverty was a basic component of the social economy programme. The available resources were earmarked to improve access to basic public services, to increase the income-earning opportunities of the poorest sectors, to carry out more programmes for housing improvement and to develop the human potential of children and young people.

10. As a result of the reactivation of social investment in 1987, an increase of 24 per cent over the previous year was required to assist the most disadvantaged sectors of the population and this target was maintained during the following years. Social investment thus amounted to 46 per cent of total public investment in 1989 and 1990.

11. Investment for least privileged groups increased from 832,000 million pesos in 1986 to 2 billion pesos in 1989 and to 2.5 billion pesos in 1990.

12. The National Government's social policy was based on the National Rehabilitation Plan, the National Plan to Combat Extreme Poverty and the Comprehensive Rural Develpoment Programme, as well as on programmes to modernize health care, reorganize education and restructure labour policy, social security and social welfare.

13. The aim of the National Rehabilitation Plan was to bring about the economic, social and political integration of the areas most affected by violence and marginalization.

14. With the formulation of 18 regional development Plans that were adopted by the rehabilitation councils, the National Rehabilitation Plan (PNR) covered 304 municipalities in the poorest areas and assisted more than 5 million persons or, in other words, 16.5 per cent of the population.

15. As a result of these plans, rural electrification programmes were carried out, the national telecommunications network was modernized, the productivity of the rural economy was strengthened, land was given to peasants and

indigenous persons, more loans were granted, agricultural marketing and the protection of natural resources were promoted and land was cultivated to ensure greater productivity.

16. The purpose of the National Plan to Combat Poverty was to change the structural factors that create poverty and to guarantee the poorest sectors the full exercise of their civil and political rights and their economic, social and cultural rights. To this end, programmes were set up to ensure basic education for all, primary health care, social welfare, social security and human settlements, as were schemes to provide basic commodities and create jobs and additional incomes.

17. The Comprehensive Rural Development Plan was designed to improve the living conditions of small farmers in rural areas of Colombia.

18. In coordination with the PNR, this Plan aimed to provide 85 per cent of the country's rural areas with services, health care, technical assistance, the marketing of commodities and infrastructure.

19. Similarly, under the Health Care Modernization Programme, the aim was to reorganize the national health system and bring it into line with political and fiscal decentralization provisions in order to increase regional efficiency in supplying public health services. Under this plan, the physical infrastructure of hospitals, health centres and clinics was improved and training and refresher courses were offered for national health system officials and the community in general, whose work was an example of participatory democracy.

20. The restructuring of the educational system was designed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Ministry of Education and it decentralized the inspection and monitoring functions of educational institutions by delegating them to the governors. The system was thus improved and Colombian education was democratized through the strengthening of the management capacity of the municipal administration.

21. With regard to labour policy, priority has been given to the right to work, worker-employer relations and Government-trade union relations, with the result that there has been an improvement in workers' living conditions.

22. The policy of making social security services more widely available was extended to many more sectors, such as self-employed workers, domestic workers, minors, the informal sectors of the economy, foster mothers and pensioners.

23. As a complement to these policies, Act No. 30 of 1988 on agrarian reform distributed 470,000 hectares of land to 20,500 peasant families, thus offering them new prospects for well-being and progress.

24. Urban reform was designed as an instrument to provide guidelines for the development of cities and to control the use of urban land; various mechanisms were thus established to promote the orderly growth of cities.

25. In view of the importance of children for the country's future, the Government has made considerable efforts to guarantee the rights of less favoured children. To this end, it has formulated plans such as the Programme of Child Welfare Homes, the National Survival and Child Development Plan (SUPERVIVIR), vaccination campaigns, the Family Education Programme for Child Development (PEFADE), the National Plan to Prevent Drug Addition and the Juvenile Code and, most importantly, it ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in January 1991.

26. Despite efforts to improve the living conditions of the poorest sectors of the population, Colombia, a nation in the full process of urbanization and settlement, still has population groups living in unfavourable conditions. The Government therefore intends in the very near future to launch ongoing activities to provide basic services in the areas of health, education, social security, housing, nutrition, culture, recreation and sports.

27. It is clear to the National Government that the problems of the developing countries, such as the housing shortage, unemployment, the lack of minimum resources and income and the absence of basic care to guarantee the dignity of the human being will continue to be matters of deep concern to mankind unless the problems of poverty and development are solved once and for all.

28. Widespread subsidies and the industrialized countries' restrictive business practices have created a deep depression in many third world countries.

29. Consequently, priority must be given to strengthening the sense of international solidarity, since there is little prospect of meeting the challenge successfully until it is realized that one of the solutions to the problem of poverty has to be the net transfer of resources and the transfer of technology from the industrial world to the developing countries, contrary to what is happening now, because, for 1991, it is estimated that $40 billion will be transferred from the South to the North.

30. For all of these reasons, nations should try to reach a full compromise to guarantee better economic, social and cultural conditions for the very large proportion of the world's population that lives in poverty and to establish mechanisms to help create the well-being to which all persons are entitled.

B. Tunisia

[22 April 1991]
[Original: French]

Human rights and extreme poverty

31. Like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights recognize that the ideal of the free human being, unburdened by fear or want, can be achieved only when conditions are created to enable every person to enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights.

32. To this end, articles 5 et seq. of the Tunisian Constitution guarantee fundamental human rights and freedoms (inviolability of the human person, freedom of conscience, freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to publish, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, etc.). Furthermore, the Tunisian Constitution goes beyond the traditional concept of public freedoms, embodying the modern concept which gives economic and social content to the political democracy it proclaims. Thus, apart from the traditional rights proclaimed since 1789, it also affirms economic and social rights, such as the right to education, the right to work and the right to health.

33. Tunisia considers that extreme poverty is a violation of human dignity and that urgent action should therefore be taken to end it. It is of the opinion that the entire international community should concern itself with social progress and social development with a view to eliminating the scourge of poverty and, through concerted international action, pursue the efforts being made at the national level to improve the living standards of populations.

34. In addition, the food crisis, which affects the peoples of the developing countries, where the majority of those who suffer from hunger and undernourishment live and where more than two thirds of the world's population produces about one third of the world's food resources, not only has serious economic and social repercussions, but also seriously undermines more basic principles and values, such as the right to life and to human dignity etablished in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

35. The situation of peoples suffering from poverty has become even worse in recent years as a result of the successive crises that have affected the world economy, including the deterioration of the international monetary system, the inflationary rise in import prices, the heavy burden of foreign debt that puts a strain on the balance of payments of many developing countries, the increased demand for food, which is partly attributable to demographic pressure, speculation and, lastly, the shortage and mounting cost of the basic factors of agricultural production.

36. The well-being of the peoples of the world depends to a large extent on the production and distribution of foodstuffs in sufficient quantities, as well as on the establishment of a world food security system which will ensure at all times that adequate supplies of food are available at reasonable prices, regardless of periodic fluctuations and sudden changes in the weather and without any political or economic pressure, thus paving the way for the development of the third world countries.

37. In order to solve the problem of poverty once and for all, no effort must be spared to bridge the ever-widening gap between the developed and developing countries and to establish a new international economic order. All these countries should be able to participate actively and fully in the new international economic relations through the creation, where possible, of suitable international mechanisms for the implementation of the measures needed for the establishment of fair and equitable relations in the area of world economic cooperation.

38. At the national level, it should be pointed out that, since 7 November, Tunisia has been involved in a major national renewal and development project. It is thus carrying out action on many fronts in an attempt to establish a balanced society based on solidarity and has decided to bank on the advancement of the individual in order to combine efforts to achieve economic development with activities to promote social development.

39. To this end, the Tunisian Government has been carrying out social welfare programmes to help disadvantaged children and needy families and has taken action to eliminate shanty towns, improve slum dwellings, electrify rural areas and provide drinking water supplies.

Human rights based on solidarity

40. Tunisia believes that, in order to alleviate the suffering of countless human beings throughout the world, especially those living in extreme poverty, the shared idea of human solidarity has to be strengthened.

41. It also considers that the improvement of the position of the developing countries in world trade through, for example, favourable terms of trade and equitable and remunerative prices for their products is necessary in order to raise national living standards, promote social development and thus mitigate the effects of poverty.

42. Lastly, it should be noted that Tunisia has given many forms of political and diplomatic, as well as financial and material, assistance to all peoples fighting for their independence.

C. Tuvalu

[3 April 1991]
[Original: English]

Human rights based on solidarity

43. As a least developed country, Tuvalu aspires to self-sufficiency and self-reliance, which are realistic only by Tuvalu improving its international standing. The words of the poet John Donne that "no man is an island" are equally true of small nation-States such as Tuvalu, who for survival need to form bonds of understanding with their friends.

44. From such common understanding or sense of solidarity may flow the single-mindedness by which the needs of individual nations may take priority over the conditions attached to aid by donor countries or by multilateral aid agencies.

45. Unless the call to strengthen the common sense of solidarity is allied with greater flexibility and discrimination in the utilization of aid, Tuvalu's aims are likely to remain unfulfilled. One of the highest priorities of Tuvalu is to enlarge the Tuvalu Trust fund to generate sufficient regular income to finance the recurrent budget. For internal reasons, the United Nations is one of the most significant potential contributors which has not done so.

Human rights and extreme poverty

46. About two thirds of the population of Tuvalu (about 9,000 in total) live on the eight islands other than the capital, Funafuti. There they subsist by traditional living. Others on the capital live in less than adequate conditions.

47. The attainment of a standard of living sufficient for the health and well-being of families may only be achieved by continuing aid dependence or the kind of measure outlined in the last paragraph on the foregoing topic, if it is to be effective during the lifetime of present Tuvaluans.

II. COMMENTS FROM UNITED NATIONS BODIES AND SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER UNITED NATIONS ORGANS

A. United Nations bodies

1. United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

[21 March 1991]
[Original: English]

The urban poverty problem

48. The poverty in human settlements is manifested and measured not only in monetary terms. Its multifaceted dimensions are evident through observation of the deplorable conditions of the living environment for the poor: inadequate shelter and services, very limited access to sources of gainful employment, poor environmental health conditions, low levels of literacy, lack of social security, and often no legal claim to the land they occupy. UNCHS (Habitat) believes that efforts for reducing the extent of poverty and increasing the poor's chances of survival in the human settlements context should be shifted from the national level to the levels of community and even neighbourhood. As most of the poor live and work in low-income communities including urban slums/squatter settlements and isolated rural settlements, the issue of increasing their access to essential goods and services and thus to improve their living conditions can be better addressed through settlement-oriented development efforts. Poverty-alleviation strategies that ignore the spatial dimension of poverty and provide goods and services on an individual or family basis, remain expressions of a welfare concern only without any lasting impact. Recent evidence has pointed out that reaching the urban poor through development-oriented strategies is dependent on the physical, economic and social conditions of the communities in which they live. Constructive forms of intervention which are expected to have a sustainable impact on the improvement of the conditions of the poor and alleviation of poverty, can best take place through an integrated approach to community development. Such approaches require new forms of cooperation between public agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs).

49. Actions along these lines would be considered an active expression of solidarity with the basic human rights of those who continue to live in absolute poverty. The likely impact of this form of solidarity, which is consistent with the goals of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 43/181, is more useful and effective than expressions of solidarity through recommendation and adoption of welfare measures.

The need for sustainable forms of support

50. Faced with the ineffectiveness of formal policies to improve the shelter and living conditions in poor urban communities, the search for practical solutions to the alleviation of poverty cannot be limited to mobilizing the cooperation of the poor with the existing system of shelter and services delivery. Seen from the poor's point of view, the problem is not one of

enhancing their capacity to participate in public sector programmes, but to seek the public (and private) sector support for their own needs and priorities. There is ample opportunity for international assistance to study the potentials of community mechanism in the improvement of living conditions of the poor, and to strengthen the administrative, technical and financial capacity of communities to make appropriate use of public support and international aid.

51. Faced with rapid urban growth, it is imperative that urban development strategies be formulated with the urban poor placed at the centre of the growth and development process and with their full participation in early phases of the programme, from policy making to project implementation.

52. The first issue in development of an appropriate strategy is the question of direct delivery of goods and services to a few at community level versus enabling the access of many to sources of such goods and services. A second issue is related to the question of direct implementation of poverty alleviation programmes by government agencies as against adoption of enabling measures to ensure the availability of goods and services. Obviously, the matter of sustainability has to be examined in light of these alternative modes of urban development strategy at the community level.

53. Another issue that requires closer examination is the actual and practical meaning of support to the poor, a term widely used to include options ranging from direct financial help to the poor to provision of technical assistance to communities in all its forms including legal and moral support. It is of utmost importance for a programme of active solidarity that support be provided in a form that allows the urban poor to contribute and play a part in the process of sustainable urban development and improvement of living conditions.

2. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

[11 March 1991]
[Original: English]

54. Decision 90/34 on fifth programming cycle resources approved by the Governing Council of UNDP at its thirty-seventh session in June 1990 called on UNDP to give priority in all its programmes and activities to the building of national capacities by promoting human development through six focus areas. One of these areas is poverty alleviation.

55. In fact, UNDP has been giving increasing attention in its programmes to issues of extreme poverty, and has been taking a number of interesting initiatives in this area. One of the most important has been the Latin American and Caribbean regional project RLA/86/004 on extreme poverty, which has produced a number of reports and analysis of the situation in the region and developed an innovative methodology for measuring the level of critical poverty.

56. Other activities have included an African regional project on the social dimensions impact of structural adjustment, implemented in collaboration with the World Bank, which has carried out country assessments and other work in 17 African countries.

3. United Nations Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs

[5 March 1991]
[Original: English]

57. Poverty has been an issue of constant interest for the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs (DIESA). Recently, for instance, we highlighted this problem in the 1989 Report on the World Social Situation. The Department's involvement in poverty issues, in fact, has grown significantly in the past few years as a result of new mandates by the General Assembly. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that DIESA provided substantive assistance in the consideration of this subject in the work leading to the adoption of the Declaration on International Economic Cooperation in particular the Revitalization of Economic Growth and Development of the Developing Countries (resolution S-18/3) by the General Assembly at its Eighteenth Special Session in 1990 and the formulation of the International Development Strategy (IDS) for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade.

58. The Declaration stressed the importance of arresting the current escalation of extreme poverty and hunger in developing countries, and urged the international community to support efforts to reverse the deterioration of this grave situation. The International Development Strategy, as adopted in General Assembly resolution 45/199 of 21 December 1990, addressed at length, the issue of poverty eradication. The Strategy cites the goal of eradicating poverty as being of the highest priority. Furthermore, the emergence of a broad consensus on strategies to be pursued toward achieving this goal is welcomed as an encouraging trend. The Strategy goes on to recommend broad-based progress in development as the best way to generate employment and income for most of the poor. For the poorest and most vulnerable of the poor, it advocates special targeted programmes and measures. In the long run, therefore, economic growth is seen as necessary to raise living standards and eliminate poverty, but, in the interim, developing countries could reduce the extremes of poverty, such as hunger and destitution, through well-conceived social measures. The struggle against poverty, according to the Strategy, is the shared responsibility of all countries, both developing and developed.

59. A number of recent General Assembly resolutions have focused entirely on the issue of poverty. "International cooperation for the eradication of poverty in developing countries" has been the title and subject of resolutions 43/195 of 20 December 1988, 44/213 of 22 December 1989 and 45/213 of 21 December 1990. Similar to the IDS, these resolutions affirm the existence of an emerging broad consensus on strategies to be pursued in seeking to eradicate poverty. In the Secretary-General's report (A/44/467) of 18 September 1989 which DIESA prepared in response to the first of the three resolutions, policy guidelines were proposed for increasing the incomes and assets of the poor and reducing their vulnerability to external shocks. Emphasis was also given to adopting institutional changes necessary for policy implementation. It should also be noted that, with respect to international cooperation, the resolutions, inter alia, call upon the relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to formulate and implement measures and activities to eradicate poverty.

60. The operational implications of poverty eradication efforts for the United Nations system are also reflected in General Assembly resolution 44/211 of 22 December 1989, entitled "Comprehensive triennial policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system". That resolution requests the Secretary-General to include in the forthcoming General Assembly report which DIESA is preparing on "International Co-operation for the Eradication of Poverty in Developing Countries", a section analysing the role that operational activities for development could play. Similarly, ECOSOC, pursuant to resolutions on revitalizing the Council, chose in decision 1990/205, to give in-depth consideration to poverty eradication in developing countries as a major policy theme to be discussed during 1992. The Department will supply a thematic analysis report on poverty eradication to assist those deliberations.

61. The issue of poverty has been mentioned in a number of other resolutions as well. For example, General Assembly resolution 45/87 of 14 December 1990 entitled "World social situation" expressed deep concern over "the persistence and increase of widespread poverty in a large number of countries". The subject of poverty, accordingly, will be one of the major topics covered in our next Report on the World Social Situation.

4. World Food Council

[27 February 1991]
[Original: English]

62. There is no doubt that the severe suffering of human beings in many parts of our planet Earth, particularly those in conditions of extreme poverty, constitutes a violation of human dignity. We all know that the roots of hunger lie in poverty and that despite our spectacular scientific achievements, the numbers of the world's poor and hungry, and the numbers of those suffering from malnourishment, are increasing every day.

63. Famine still threatens the lives of millions, and specific nutritional diseases are responsible for an estimated 14 million deaths a year among children five years old and under. This statistic is not going to change for the better unless nations, either individually or collectively, take more determined action in favour of the growing numbers of our world's hungry poor.

64. It can reasonably be said that there are today in the world some 550 million people - approximately 10 per cent of the world's population - who do not have enough to eat, and many who do not have the right kinds of food they need for a healthy active life. Their situation remains desperate and their needs continue to require our urgent attention.

65. In order to maintain concerted international action in the fight against world hunger, the United Nations General Assembly created the World Food Council in 1974 to act as the highest political body in the United Nations dealing with food matters. Since then, the Council has directed the attention of the world to the changing face of global hunger and malnutrition, and the continuing challenge of providing enough food for all members of the human family.

66. As an instrument of policy guidance and support for the food security needs of developing countries, the Council's recent ministerial sessions (in Beijing, Nicosia, Cairo and Bangkok) provided a comprehensive review of the world's food situation and approved a set of proposals and recommendations which seek to substantially reduce in the 1990s the number of hungry and malnourished people in the world.

67. While recognizing that each country must take its own initiatives, Council members have committed themselves to work together towards the elimination of hunger and poverty.

68. Specifically, the Cairo Declaration calls on countries to take steps which would improve food security and help achieve, in the 1990s, the following four hunger-alleviation objectives:

(a) The elimination of starvation and death caused by famine;

(b) A substantial reduction of malnutrition and mortality among young children;

(c) A tangible reduction in chronic hunger; and

(d) The elimination of major nutritional deficiency diseases.

69. A range of actions in support of these goals was proposed for adoption by individual countries according to their special circumstances. The proposed actions include: major efforts to raise the level of political support for the elimination of hunger and malnutrition, both nationally and internationally; to make an increase in food security a central objective of the International Development Strategy of the 1990s; economic and social measures to increase access to food by the poor and to improve the nutritional levels of the most vulnerable groups; measures to increase food production and improve its distribution through national food strategies which seek to achieve a sustainable reduction of hunger.

70. The Council's efforts in recent years have contributed to building an international consensus on development priorities and policies directed at reducing hunger and poverty. In this connection, it is encouraging to note that the General Assembly incorporated the four hunger-alleviation objectives of the Council's Cairo Declaration in the United Nations International Development Strategy for the 1990s.

71. There is an urgent need for us to strengthen our common resolve and sense of human solidarity in our efforts to alleviate the burden of poverty and finally restore human dignity to many of our fellow human beings who, through no fault of their own, have been deprived of their fundamental human rights.

5. World Food Programme (WFP)

[18 March 1991]
[Original: English]

72. From the inception of its operations in 1963, WFP has sought to use its assistance to alleviate hunger and poverty in sustainable ways. We therefore welcome these resolutions and regard them as a confirmation of the importance of, and support for, the work that the Programme has already undertaken over almost three decades. Much more could be done if more resources were made available for the attack on extreme poverty through fundamentally restructuring expenditures in the developing countries themselves and redirecting current aid flows (much of which do not address problems of poverty and hunger), and by donors providing additional official development assistance specifically for the alleviation and eventual eradication of extreme poverty.

73. Providing considerably more resources for addressing the problems that cause extreme poverty is only one part of an international strategy; the other is the design and implementation of programmes and projects that not only reach the poor but also assist them in improving their well-being in lasting ways. In this regard, the type of assistance WFP provides - and the ways in which WFP provides it - has an intrinsic advantage over other forms of aid. Project food aid is largely self-targeting. No other form of development assistance transfers such a large amount of resources directly to the very poor. WFP's current portfolio of development projects makes food available to an estimated 70 million people. In addition, more than 8 million refugees and displaced people receive almost their entire food requirements from WFP, and 3 to 4 million people, the victims of natural disasters, receive emergency food relief from the Programme each year.

74. One other general comment WFP would like to make is that, until relatively recently, alleviating extreme poverty was addressed mainly through social sector policies and programmes. There has been a strong convergence of opinion in the past year or so that it is equally important to design and implement policies and programmes in the economic sectors that will lead not only to the eventual eradication of extreme poverty but also to equitable, and hence sustainable, economic growth. The World Development Report of the World Bank, with its focus on poverty, the statement of the Managing Director of the IMF on "high quality growth", the Human Development Report of the UNDP, the Cairo Declaration of the World Food Council and the policy statement of the DAC aid ministers on Development Cooperation in the 1990s all emphasize this point.

75. The International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, approved by the General Assembly in December last year, stressed that "The decade of the 1990s must witness a significant improvement of the human condition everywhere and establish a mutually reinforcing relationship between economic growth and human welfare. The need to strengthen this relationship is, in fact, a principal theme of the present Strategy. It has not only to be reflected in national efforts but assisted by the international community through financial and technical support". This Strategy should provide the framework for concerted action. It is our view, based on almost three decades of practical experience, that sustained progress in the alleviation of extreme poverty can best be achieved through national

strategies that give the highest priority to that goal and in which aid agencies cooperate together with the Government in a cohesive programme of action.

76. At its sixteenth sesion in May 1990, the World Food Council reviewed coordination issues in the United Nations system in which the activities of some 35 agencies are significantly related to hunger problems. It was noted that, "While these agencies are engaged in various food security-related fields, few focus sharply on hunger alleviation. The greatest coordination problems persist at the country level and it should be noted that international agencies still are typically perceived to compete excessively".

77. The Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), which is comprised of the five operational funds and programmes accounting for the bulk of development assistance provided by the United Nations system (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, IFAD and WFP) devoted its annual meeting of heads of agencies in 1990 to "Poverty Alleviation - A Global Challenge". At that meeting the need for a clearer focus on poverty alleviation within a framework of growth and development was strongly stressed. It was agreed that the rationale of poverty alleviation lay in recognition of the most basic of all human rights, the right to food. There was also a clear argument that poverty alleviation was supportive of growth.

78. It was agreed that the JCGP agencies could adopt a focus on poverty alleviation and human development for their collaborative efforts. In that context, it was agreed that the five agencies would undertake a process of operational collaboration to combat poverty beginning in several developing countries, which have now been selected. It was suggested at the meeting that concrete examples should be drawn from the range of experience of the different JCGP agencies to strengthen the proposition that investment in the poor was a cost-effective way to support economic growth. This would enable the JCGP, in pursuing these efforts, to become more persuasive with Governments in both developing and developed countries.

B. Specialized agencies

1. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

[4 April 1991]
[Original: English]

79. Many of the issues inherent in the two resolutions referred to were addressed by the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) in 1979 and continue to be the focus of the WCARRD follow-up programme. The main thrust of the programme is concerned with the alleviation of rural poverty through the fostering of an appropriate national and international policy environment and the implementation of specific action programmes to improve the access of the poor to land, water, production inputs and markets as well as farm- and non-farm employment and fair wages, and also health, educational and housing facilities. The fundamental objectives of these policies and programmes are growth with equity, redistribution of economic power, and people's participation. Particular emphasis is given to the extreme poor - whether landless labourers, ethnic minorities, women or children.

80. The Third Progress Report on WCARRD Follow-up, which will be submitted to the FAO Conference in 1991, is primarily concerned with the analysis of trends in rural poverty and the effectiveness of national policies and programmes in poverty alleviation. The analysis contained in this report will subsequently be used as the basis for the preparation of a shorter report entitled "Review and Analysis of Agrarian Reform and Rural Development" for submission to ECOSOC in 1992 (as requested by ECOSOC decision 1981/185 of 23 July 1981).

81. A Review of FAO's and United Nations Agencies' Experiences in implementing the WCARRD Programme of Action, which has been undertaken by consultants in cooperation with the members of the ACC Task Force on Rural Development, will also be discussed at the 19th meeting of the Task Force in May 1991 and subsequently by the FAO Conference together with the Third Progress Report. It is expected that this will lead to further endorsement of the poverty orientation of the WCARRD programme and proposals for refocusing and revitalizing the follow-up programme of both FAO and Task Force members to take account of changing conditions and priorities since 1979.

82. The FAO Plan of Action for Integration of Women in Development also explicitly addresses human rights issues and the problems of rural women, and prescribes actions to enhance their civic, legal and economic rights.

83. FAO is also in the process of preparing a Plan of Action on People's Participation in Rural Development for presentation to the FAO Council in June 1991. The overall aim is to promote sustainable rural development with equity, with particular attention to the poor, by mobilizing rural communities through voluntary self-reliant organizations of their own choice. The implementation of this objective will require, inter alia, greater decentralization of public administration, the creation of more favourable legal and policy conditions for people's participation as well as changes in the design and monitoring and evaluation of participatory projects.

84. The International Conference on Nutrition, which will be jointly convened by FAO and WHO in 1992, will also address the nutritional needs of the rural poor. Placing emphasis on improving the broad range of health, social and economic conditions to achieve and maintain improved nutritional well-being, the ICN will provide a unique opportunity for focusing world attention on the multi-faceted nature of nutrition concerns and to devise appropriate strategies and programmes to tackle nutrition problems through action at national, regional and global levels.

85. In the area of food security, FAO's World Food Security Compact, adopted by the FAO Conference in 1985, continues to provide a comprehensive framework of moral commitments for Governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals, with the chief aim of ensuring that all people at all times are in a position to produce or procure the basic food they need. To this end, FAO is assisting interested developing countries in drawing up comprehensive national food security policies and programmes. Such policies and programmes are, in particular, based on the broadened concept of food security, first adopted by the FAO Conference in 1983, which emphasizes the three pillars of ensuring the adequacy of food supplies, the stability of flows and supplies and access to food, especially by the poor.

2. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

[6 March 1991]
[Original: English]

86. IFAD submitted a paper entitled "Poverty Alleviation: an IFAD Perspective" which was the subject of discussion at IFAD's Project Implementation Workshop held at Chengdu, China, from 22 October-2 November 1990. The paper can be ordered from IFAD, Rome or consulted at the Centre for Human Rights, Geneva.

3. International Labour Organisation (ILO)

[26 March 1991]
[Original: English]

Human rights based on solidarity

87. The concept of human rights based on solidarity lies at the core of the International Labour Organisation's mandate of peace founded on social justice. More explicit expression of this principle may be found in the Declaration concerning the Aims and Purposes of the International Labour Organisation adopted by the twenty-sixth session of the General Conference of the ILO meeting in Philadelphia in 1944.

88. The Declaration of Philadelphia, the text of which is annexed to the ILO Constitution, affirms that "all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity" and that "the attainment of the conditions in which this shall be possible must constitute the central aim of national and international policy". The Declaration makes it a responsibility of the ILO to examine and consider all international economic and financial policies and measures in the light of this fundamental objective and to further programmes conducive to its achievement. The Declaration finally affirms that the principles set forth in it are fully applicable to all peoples everywhere as a matter of concern to the whole civilized world.

Extreme poverty

89. At the Global Consultation on the Realization of the Right to Development as a Human Right (Geneva, 8-12 January 1990), the paper submitted by the International Labour Office (HR/RD/1990/CONF.7) contains the following remarks on the subject of extreme poverty:

> "Denial of the right to development in its most flagrant as well as massive manifestation is found in the conditions of extreme poverty in which hundreds of millions of people are living today, mostly in Third World countries. The ILO's response to this situation is based mainly on its efforts to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment, considered as a major goal of policy and as the means of achieving in practice the realization of the right to work recognized in the

Universal Declaration and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Measures to be adopted for attaining this goal are provided for, in particular, in the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122), and in the Employment Policy Recommendation, 1964 (No. 122), and the Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1964 (No. 169). In addition to these instruments on employment policy, other particular aspects of the right to work are dealt with in many other instruments such as those on human resources develoment, vocational guidance, training and rehabilitation, employment services, protection against arbitrary termination of employment and income protection in the event of unemployment.

"Action for the practical implementation of these measures is undertaken within the framework of the World Employment Programme launched by the ILO in 1969 and on the lines of the Declaration of Principles and Programme of Action adopted by the World Employment Conference convened by the ILO in 1976. According to this programme of action, national development policies should have as a priority objective the promotion of employment and the satisfaction of the basic needs of the population, such needs being a country-specific and dynamic concept which includes individual consumer requirements of a family and essential community services and should be placed within a context of national independence, the dignity of individuals and peoples and their freedom to chart their destiny without hindrance.

"A recent development of particular importance was the High-Level Meeting on Employment and Structural Adjustment, convened by the ILO in November 1987. The Meeting recognized the need for measures to encourage stable, sustained, non-inflationary growth and for a flexible response to change, while stressing the importance of scrutinizing the impact of stabilization and adjustment programmes on poverty groups. International organizations were seen as having an important role to play in helping countries to design programmes which, while achieving their adjustment objectives, maintained essential social services and provided the poor with productive assets. The Meeting recognized the need fully to integrate in decision-making on adjustment policies, their social dimensions and consequences.

"It is accordingly in keeping with its constitutional mandate, and with due regard to the issues confronting the world community, that the ILO considers it important, in the current preparation of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, that the question of employment be included as an additional element in the Strategy and, in that context, to pay due regard to the key role of international labour standards, those relating to employment and the right to work as well as to other basic human rights, in ensuring that any development strategy duly places the human being at the centre of its objectives in accordance with the principle proclaimed both by the ILO Declaration of Philadelphia of 1944 and the Declaration on the Right to Development."

90. The ILO was pleased to report to its Governing Body at its 248th (November 1990) and 249th (February-March 1991) sessions, that its principal development concerns were reflected in the Strategy and that employment in particular figured prominently. It is considered that the centrepiece of the policy response to the employment problems is to be found in paragraph 81 of the Strategy where employment creation and poverty eradication are closely linked. As the absence of adequate incomes due to landlessness or lack of work opportunities is a prime cause of poverty, the generation of productive employment and incomes is to be viewed as a major means of eradicating poverty.

91. It may also be mentioned that the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, when it noted in its 1990 report the adoption of Commission on Human Rights resolution 1990/15 on human rights and extreme poverty, referred in this connection to the section of its General Report that was, as usual, devoted to the application of the Employment Policy Convention 1964 (No. 122).

92. The same concern for the question of human rights and of poverty was evidenced by the statement of the Director-General of the ILO to the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (Paris, 3-14 September 1990). The three fundamental criteria cited by Mr. Michel Hansenne in order for aid to be truly effective, included: first, popular participation; second, gearing development efforts towards meeting the needs of the poor; and third, the establishment of priorities between competing social and economic objectives.

4. World Health Organization (WHO)

[18 March 1991]
[Original: English]

93. The health consequences of extreme poverty are a central concern of both WHO policy as well as the work of the organization. That is because the most common determining factor in the chronic ill-health and high mortality rates which afflict many millions of people is poverty. Thus the basic aim of WHO's Health For All strategy is reduction of the inequities in health status and access to health care that are apparent between population groups around the world.

94. In implementing the Health For All strategy WHO has learnt the importance of systematically identifying the most vulnerable population groups as well as the factors contributing to their vulnerability. This is imperative in order to identify the most appropriate and effective interventions. Examples of such groups are landless agricultural labourers, workers in the "informal sector", the unemployed, the urban poor living in slums and shanty towns, refugees and displaced persons. WHO believes this is also an important consideration in tackling the human rights aspects of extreme poverty. We need to move beyond the more conventional indicators of health status to identify other aspects of human suffering which also have obvious health consequences. The physical and sexual abuse of women and children, homelessness and social isolation come easily to mind, serving to underline the fact that we are facing a problem which afflicts all countries to varying degrees and not just the poorest.

95. The past few years have witnessed some encouraging signs that the international community may now be prepared to face up to the problem of extreme poverty and its consequences. The international financing institutions which, a short time ago, were advocating economic adjustment with little regard for the social consequences, are now beginning to advance the notion that the provision of basic poverty alleviation measures as well as investment in health care and education, are a prerequisite for successful economic devlopment. However, since we have yet to see these ideas fully reflected in policy and action, one must avoid complacency. Nevertheless, WHO believes that the time is ripe for taking coordinated action to advocate the need for poverty alleviation and other human rights-related goals to be included in national development policies. In so doing it will be important to make clear that severe human suffering is often a predictable consequence of certain national and international behaviour. In that sense it is therefore a matter of choice rather than of accident or destiny.

C. Other United Nations organs

1. Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC)

[19 April 1991]
[Original: English]

96. The linking of human rights based on solidarity with situations of extreme poverty has led ECLAC to the formulation of concrete proposals for achieving equity in economic development. The general outline of these proposals is contained in the recent ECLAC publication "Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity" (Sales No. E.90/II.6.6).

97. In the coming months, ECLAC will be intensifying its work in the two closely related questions of extreme poverty and equity.

98. ECLAC has transmitted to the Centre for Human Rights a copy of the publication referred to above, along with copies of articles that recently appeared in the CEPAL Review: "The magnitude of poverty in Latin America" and "The complexity of evaluating social development". These can be consulted at the Centre for Human Rights, along with a recent study by ECLAC's Social Development Division on the question of human resources, adjustment and equitable development (LC/R.812).

2. United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)

[28 February 1991]
[Original: English]

99. UNCED is pleased to refer to its progress report on "Poverty and Environmental Degradation" (A/CONF.151/PC/15). The report will be before the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Geneva, 18 March-5 April 1991), in accordance with the mandate formulated in General Assembly resolution 44/228 which in operative paragraph 12 (h) refers to "improvement of the living and working environment of the poor in urban slums and rural areas, through the

eradication of poverty by, inter alia, implementing integrated rural and urban development programmes, as well as taking other appropriate measures at all levels necessary to stem the degradation of the environment".

100. Pursuant to paragraph 15 (d) of resolution 44/228, the Preparatory Committee is expected to take up the elaboration of general rights and obligations of States in the field of the environment, which may include a consideration of related questions of human rights.

101. A copy of the report on "Poverty and Environmental Degradation" may be consulted at the Centre for Human Rights.

3. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

[29 March 1991]
[Original: French]

102. Poverty is a phenomenon not only of the third world, but also of the industrialized countries. Social and economic change has created a group of rejects and marginalized persons called the "new poor". They are the victims of the economic crisis and of the impact of the technological revolution, which threaten them and much of the working population as well.

103. In the North and in the South alike, there is the danger of a deep rift in human society between the haves and the have nots. Human society cannot operate at two speeds. The failure of some political attempts to restructure society on the basis of theoretical equality should not lead us to conclude that a society based on competition, not on solidarity, can be a solution.

104. At a meeting organized by UNESCO in cooperation with the United Nations University in 1986 and entitled "Pauvreté et Progrès", it was clearly stressed that poverty and progress were multidimensional and that their definition varied widely from one culture to another and from one society to another. It was stated that what is needed is a type of development which is consistent with the true values of life and in which the poor, who are increasing in number in both the developing and the industrialized countries, can enjoy the most fundamental human rights, namely, education and employment, and that this would be a challenge to all development policies. It was also pointed out that the inequalities are far from having been eliminated and that they would even tend to become more glaring in future.

105. A selection of studies and articles submitted at the meeting has been compiled in a work entitled "Pauvreté, Progrès et Développement", published jointly by UNESCO and Harmattan in 1990. The first part may be regarded as an attempt to analyse the phenomenon of poverty, impoverishment and marginalization in order to gain a clearer understanding of the problem of development. The second part is a collection of actual national experiences and theoretical and pragmatic considerations on action to combat poverty and on the phenomenon of impoverishment and underdevelopment. The wide variety of situations described and the solutions put forward for the elimination of inequalities are useful both as information and as warnings.

4. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

[19 February 1991]
[Original: English]

106. UNRISD's work is in large part informed by the belief that collective social rights form a complementary relationship with the rights of the person: where collective social rights are well established, and community empowerment has been realized, individual economic, social and cultural rights are more likely to be obtained and to be maintained. This belief formed the basis of UNRISD's earlier work on participation and development, which has in turn led to our current research on participation and social change in East Central Europe, participation and sustainable development, and the economic crisis, adjustment and social change in Africa and Latin America.

107. The concept of collective rights is especially important for an analysis of human rights and extreme poverty. Poverty is most often suffered by a person as a member of a group - which may be based on geography, occupation, caste, gender or race - rather than as an individual. Collective or community-based initiatives to address extreme poverty are therefore likely to be most effective in alleviating poverty

108. Regarding General Assembly resolution 44/148, UNRISD is currently conducting research on ethnic conflict and development, which includes case studies in 15 countries. The aim in undertaking this research is to determine the nature and characteristics of conflict between ethnic groups in different situations, and their implications for the development process. A conference is scheduled for June 1991 to discuss preliminary results of the studies and their policy implications, and an overview report will be completed by the end of 1991.

III. COMMENTS FROM INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

A. Council of Europe

[7 March 1991]
[Original: English]

109. The Council of Europe transmitted reports which were prepared between 1986 and 1990 and which relate to poverty, social exclusion and human rights. These documents can be ordered from the Council of Europe, Strasbourg or consulted at the Centre for Human Rights, Geneva.

B. Organization of American States (OAS)

[14 March 1991]
[Original: English]

110. In 1987, the OAS General Assembly adopted resolution 858 entitled "Fight against poverty", in which the General Assembly:

"RESOLVES:

1. To reaffirm the commitment of the American countries to join forces to battle the scourge of extreme poverty in the hemisphere,

2. To urge the member States of the Organization to participate actively in the special meeting convoked by the Inter-American Economic and Social Council (CIES) to discuss the topic 'Fight Against Extreme Poverty', by contributing their experience with a knowledge of this field.

3. To instruct CIES to present the conclusions reached at its special meeting to the Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs scheduled to be held in Bogotá in April 1988, in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the Organization of American States."

111. On the basis of this mandate, the Inter-American Economic and Social Council prepared a report on the eradication of poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, a copy of which was transmitted to the Centre for Human Rights, where it can be consulted.

IV. COMMENTS FROM NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

A. Inter-Parliamentary Union

[25 February 1991]
[Original: English]

112. The questions of underdevelopment in the Third World countries and the suffering of human beings, particularly those who find themselves in conditions of extreme poverty, and the need for stronger international solidarity with these people, have always been given close attention by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The world parliamentary community, which entirely shares the view expressed in the United Nations resolutions that extreme poverty and exclusion from society constitute a violation of human dignity and that urgent national and international action is required to eliminate them, has been constantly examining ways of contributing, at the level of Parliaments, to the attainment of this objective.

113. Action of the Inter-Parliamentary Union along these lines is twofold. On the one hand, it encourages its members to broaden their human rights activities, including by setting up, within national Parliaments, human rights bodies or groups. This enables Parliaments to work more effectively for the promotion of human rights in all areas and to monitor their respective Government's policies and action regarding the implementation of international human rights instruments and resolutions.

114. On the other hand, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has carried out a number of activities relating to, inter alia, the elimination of poverty and promotion of full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights of people, including those of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals.

115. To cite a few examples, the 83rd Inter-Parliamentary Conference held in Nicosia from 30 March to 7 April 1990, pointed to the inadmissibility of a situation where 1 billion people live below the poverty line and urged States, among other steps, to spread out wealth, especially to the poor. It also emphasized the need for special measures, in terms of employment opportunities and access to new technologies, in favour of mentally and physically handicapped persons and disadvantaged young people, as well as of children of refugees, foreigners, displaced persons and those excluded from their countries of origin.

116. The Inter-Parliamentary Council, at its session in Punta del Este in October 1990, called in particular on each National Parliament to take the necessary steps, through appropriate national mechanisms, to monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children which had stressed, in particular, the need for a global attack on poverty.

117. The 84th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, also held in Punta del Este, adopted a resolution emphasizing that policies in favour of development, in order to be fully effective, must be accompanied by measures promoting social progress, with a view to protecting the very poor and enhancing the role of women in development.

118. Lastly, the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Economic Co-operation in the Asia-Pacific Region held in Jomtien (Thailand) from 28 January to 1 February 1991 expressed concern that while the richest 5 per cent of the population earned almost two thirds of regional GNP, the poorest 80 per cent of the population accounted for less than one fifth of the region's income. The Conference proposed a number of measures to remedy the situation, including the consideration by the Asian Development Bank and relevant multilateral agencies of the proposal for a contingency fund to meet the urgent needs of poorer developing countries in the region.

119. There is no doubt that parliamentarians throughout the world will continue their efforts aimed at the elimination of widespread poverty and strengthening a sense of human solidarity, particularly with those people who live in conditions of extreme poverty.